

Fred Bassett Blair
3236 N. 15th St.
Milwaukee 6, Wis.
53206

August 30, 1963

Prof. Ethier-Blais
University of Montreal
Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Dear Sir:

I have just read an article in The Canadian Tribune of Sept. 2, 1963, in which there is mention of your name and of certain remarks you made at a Gouchishing Conference.

I agree with your remarks, but that is not why I write. I write you to find out more about my own family.

We now bear the name of "Blair", because our original name of Blais was corrupted by English-speaking people in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota where my father's family lived. My older brother has legally changed his name back to Blais, and I am considering it also.

My father was born in Fairbault, Minnesota Oct. 20, 1866. He was one of a numerous tribe of brothers and sisters and cousins bearing the same name. I do not know his father's first name, but his mother's last name was Goutu. Her father was a large and very powerful man who was engaged in the fur trade between Montreal and Green Bay for many years, and who died at the age of 105 in Minnesota, I believe, early in this century.

I write to you to find out if you know anything about two questions that we in our family are curious about.

1) There is a legend that there are two families of Blais in North America, who are not related to each other.

2) There is a legend that the original Blais in our own family came to Canada several hundred years ago from near Paris in a "Chaloupe", as my father called it, apparently a river boat, with his two sons after his wife and the rest of the children were killed in religious conflict. The legend has it that he and his sons were Huguenots, but that their descendants became Catholic after living and intermarrying in Canada. My own grandfather studied to be a priest, but quit before donning the black robe, then married and raised a large family.

I judge by your name that the Blais' strain is in your family. Perhaps you could cast some light on the questions I raise? We would appreciate it very much if you would tell us something about the Blais family in Canada.

Yours,

Fred Bassett Blair
Fred Bassett Blair (Blais).

On our family. 12/26/68. Compiled for Fred Blair from obituaries, etc.
Furnished by Madeline Thurston (incomplete)

OUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY

Children of John Andrew Blair (Jean Baptiste Blais)

LAWRENCE HENRY BLAIR. Born 1894, Swanville, Minn. Died at Camp Hancock, Georgia 1918. Army Sergeant. Cause of death: flu. No children.

CLEMENCE ALVIE BLAIR. Born Aug. 9, 1896. Machinist. Married Isabel Reinhardt in Fond du Lac, Wis. Two children: Margie (now Mrs. Orville Meisted, Reedsburg, Wis, one son Kenneth), and Clemence A. Blais, Jr., now in E. Moline, married, wife Jimmie; four children: Andy (C.A. Blais III), Kevin, Michel and Machel (twins). After Isabel died, Clem married again: wife Edna Nehls Summerfield. She had one son Clyde. He was adopted; now married to Gwen; they have two children, Karen and Billie.

CLARENCE (JOHN CLARENCE ANDREW) BLAIR. Lives in LA. Wife Harriet Lewis of New York. Two children: Fred Bassett Blair and Mary Ellen Mares, wife of David Mares.

HAZEL MILDRED (BLAIR) KREIS. Husband Joseph was a mail-carrier in Fond du Lac, Wis. They had four children: two girls who died soon after birth, and two sons Laurence, who died of intestinal and colon ulcers at about 17 and David, who is a professional soldier. David has three children, I believe, and is still in the army.

NAOMI CLAIRE BLAIR. Born 1902. Lives in Los Angeles. Was married and is divorced. No children. A registered nurse, and one of my most favorite sisters. A poet of considerable talent.

FLORENCE BLAIR. Died of spinal meningitis before the first year.

MYSELF. You'll never know my full history.

RALPH EDWARD BLAIR. Born Oct. 27, 1907. Married to Myrtle Mills of Neshkoro, Wis. One child Charlene; married to a teacher named Lundy. One child, a cute little girl. They live in Florida now, that is Ed and Myrtle, and perhaps the Lundys also.

HARRIET AIMEE BLAIR. Married to Orville M. Slye. Live in W. Hyattsville, Maryland. Have two children: Oldest Joanne, Now Mrs. Sisk (?). She and her husband are lawyers and disport themselves on Chesapeake Bay. The other child is Orville M. Slye, Jr., married to a sweet girl named Nuanita whose last name I don't know. They have two children, I believe. He is a fire prevention engineer.

GRACE AMELIA BLAIR. Born Jan. 17, 1911. Married to Emil Gardos. They live in Budapest, Hungary and have one son John, who is now married to Mari Toth-Antal. Two children: Attila, 10, and Andrea around three. (updated)

MADELINE ELAINE THURSTON. Divorced. Living in Green Bay, Wis. One child: Mary Sue Thurston, now assistant curator of museum at Monroe, N.Y.

This is the immediate family.

Parents: John Andrew Blair (Jean Baptiste Blais) and Mary Emerila Blair
(Bassette)

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father's

On our/family . Dad was born Oct. 20, 1866 in Fairbault, Minn. His father was Andrew Blais, born in Parish St. Pierre, Quebec Province, 1837. Married April 12, 1858 to Emilie Coutu (Couture?) at St. Marie, Michigan. Emilie Coutu born 1842, where? She was daughter of Joseph Coutu (or Couture), was adopted out when young and bore the name of her adopted parents, Du Luc (or Du Lac). Emilie Coutu born in the parish of Three Rivers, Quebec in 1842.

NOTE: There is no information as to why Emile was adopted out. But since Joseph Couture (my father,s maternal grandfather) was in the fur trade, it might have happened because he and his wife were away from home so much.

My father was John Baptiste Blais. Apparently he changed his name to John Andrew because "Jean Baptiste" or "Batisé" are derogatory names used about French-Canadians by Anglos, such as "Miguel" or "Pancho" about Mexican/Americans. The name Blair was an anglicization of Blais which my brother Clem retains. So do many of my Dad's relatives. The name Blais is quite common, I am told, in Canada, sometimes hyphenated as in Etienne, Blais, a prominent Canadian professor.

We have yet no information as to the maiden name of Joseph Coutu's wife. Joseph Coutu (word means knife in French-Canadian and is unpronounceable for English-speaking people) was a legendary figure among fur-traders and pioneer settlers of northern Michigan and Minnesota, for his great size and strength and peaceable nature. Later I'll tell more of Dad's tales about him.

Father had a sister Mary Blais, born July 28, 1868 at Negaunee, Mich., who married Homer Callier (pronounced Ka-yay). They moved to the Tacoma, Seattle area many years ago, had many children and grandchildren, who presumably live there yet. A brother, Henry Blais, born Nov. 25, 1874, last lived at International Falls, Minn., where he moved after going broke in a grocery at Cass Lake, Minn. He had a number of children, one of whom Pearl intended to be a nun when we saw her last in 1924. There was another brother Oliver, who never married, another Joseph, who was killed out logging, and a brother Eli killed in a sawmill accident. Another sister, Hersula, born 1872, died in infancy.

MOTHER'S FAMILY: Mother's father was Louis A. Bassett (or Bassette). Born in New York at about 1850. Died: Berlin, Wis., July 28, 1927. He was the son of Alexander Bassett and Sophia (Morse) Bassett. In addition to Mother, the children of Louis Bassett were: Hattie Slater who had four children; Carlton, Robert (a sailor) and two daughters, one married to an Obrien and living in Boston, the other probably thereabout. Secondly, Flor Mendleski of Fond du Lac, who had 3 children: Norman (deceased), widow living in Milwaukee with some children; Robert (in Fond du Lac operating a bowling alley in partnership with another guy) and Leonia, married, with children, and living in Fond du Lac. I believe she has several children. Another sister of my mother was Nellie Christowsky (or Christy) who lived in Fond du Lac and had about 8 or 9 children. She has been divorced for some years and married again to a barber named Vince Beudry (not sure of name). They moved to Bremerton, Wash. some years ago. The only cousin I really knew was her oldest girl, Irene, married name Luttenberger, who has a number of children. They may be near their mother in Washington. A brother of Mother's was named Alvin Bassett. He was an inventor of various contrivances and made money from them. He and his wife were ashamed of and shunned his poor relations, especially us, since mother took in wash-

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ing while he was courting his wife-to-be, Lizzie (Lily) Zalmansky (Zalman) of Berlin. They have several children we never knew, though they are 1st cousins.

The other sister of my mother was Ida Hausmann, late of International Falls, Minn. Her Husband John Hausmann, was 1st cousin of my father. His mother was deserted by Hausmann, who got lost on the frontier. She remarried a man named Van Curler, and there are a number of Van Curlers scattered from Cal. to Alaska who are related to us. The Hausmanns had about 9 children many of whom are living, and have children and grandchildren of their own.

I do not know all the cousins on this side of the family. I remember the older girl Mabel, who was led astray by Pat O'Brien. Another girl, Ethel, married a Polish-American machinist in the Great Northern shops at Superior, Wis., named Krycz ~~xxx~~ (?). They had no children. Another boy, my age, named Earl, went to Alaska in the early 20s and managed Piggly Wiggly stores in Fairbanks and Nome. He married a woman who took him for about \$30,000 some years ago in a divorce battle, and also got the kids. There was a boy named Lester who also went to Alaska and lost a thumb fighting a fire in Anchorage at 90 below zero. He had several children and was divorced by his wife, an Alaskan woman of Italian ancestry. I saw him 1st in Milwaukee. There was a sister Gerline, whom I know nothing now. There was another sister Leone who married a fellow named Toutant from Chippewa Falls, Wis. They have children and presumably live in California now.

There were several others in Mother's family who died of diphtheria when an epidemic struck the Minn. frontier in the 1880s. Also mother had a brother named Fred Bassett, whose name I took, who never married and died in a railroad accident out West during the 1st World War. He was her favorite brother and quite a character.

Now, as to mother's family. Her father Louis Bassett was the son of Alexander Bassett. We as yet know nothing of his father or mother. He married Sophia Morse in July 1846 -where I don't know. They moved to New York state in 1852, later to Wisconsin and to Iowa in 1877, where they were on a farm near Stillwater, Iowa. Later, in 1887, they moved to Elma, Iowa, where great-grandfather died in 1897. She died there at the home of her daughter Mrs. Harris, on Oct. 19, 1921. They had 9 children of whom I know nothing. Her daughter was Mrs. J.W. Harris. She had 9 children -where they are and their names I do not know.

Great-grandmother Bassett had a brother Alexander, who was a hermit near Red Granite for many years. He had accidentally killed a child sweetheart while cleaning a rifle and went out of his head. He spent some years at Mendota Hospital then escaped and went on foot to Iowa to join his family. Then he returned to a little cabin about two miles out of Red Granite on what is now Highway 21. There he was maintained by a sister, our great-grand-aunt Mrs. Amelia Chaffin of Ripon who was married to a storekeeper and well-to-do. He died twenty or thirty years ago. Children at Red Granite called him Santa Claus because of his long hair and whiskers. I met him several times but his memories were away back in the 19th century and he never could figure out our relationship.

There were other relatives of Great Grandmother Bassett whom Mother talked about.

Mother's grandmother was named Harriet Gonyo (Gonyea?) (Gonyo? Gagne? Ganier? Garnier? Gagnon? - take your pick.) There is nothing yet about her parents.

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I do know that a sister of hers was married to a man named Rivers, who had a daughter married to a Le Mieux, whose son was named La Mue (a re-spelling) and lived in Red Granite as a barber. The Le Mieux also had relatives living in Fond du Lac. This common name is sometimes mis-spelled La Meer, or La Mere. Legend has it that Louis XIV had a bastard son whom he named Le Mieux meaning "The Best", and that all these bastards are descended from him.

The Gonves, or Gonyos, may be related to the old woman of the Prairie du Chien frontier, Mary Anne La Buche, whose son was killed by Red Bird. She was part Indian and part Negro and married three times--once to a Du Bouchier once to a Charbonneau, and once to a Gancier whose son was killed. A granddaughter of hers was scalped by Red Bird but lived, went to Three Rivers, Canada and married. There are about 800 descendants of old Mrs. Gancier in this area, most of whom do not acknowledge their ancestry for reasons of racism, or are unaware of it.

Mother's grandfather was Meadore Cluey who died Jan. 17, 1915 at the home of Ralph Cluey (my great grand-uncle) in Red Granite. Meadore Cluey and Harriet Gonye were married in 1850, where I don't know. Before that, Medore, who was born in Toronto, Ontario in 1825, married at the age of 19 a woman named Ros Shandrin. They had one child and both mother and child died soon after the birth.

Meadore married Harriet Gonye at the age of 19 in 1853 and they were married for 56 years, she dying in 1905. They moved from Canada first to Illinois and then to Waushara County, Wis., where they remained. The story is that he served as a scout in the Union Army during the Civil War. I never knew my grandmother, who was Meadore Cluey's daughter, and don't recall her name. She died at 39 with her newly born, leaving my mother, who was 12 years old, to care for all the children. Mother raised them, keeping Nellie and Hattie after she married my father till they were old enough to be on their own.

My grandmother Bassett (nee Cluey) had a number of brothers and sisters. The oldest was Albert Cluey, who married a woman named Fink, and had several children named Hazel (who married Lueck from near Red Granite), Lucille (who married a first cousin named Fink and lived at Mercer, Wis., where he was a guide. They had many children.) The youngest girl, Evelyn, married Gene Cappalletti from Red Granite. They were divorced after having one child. Another brother of Albert was Ralph Cluey, who worked in the quarries when I did. He had a number of children, Alvin, Florence, Luella, etc. Another Cluey was Uncle John, who had no children. A Cluey girl became Mrs. Eliza Rivers, who had a daughter who became Mrs. Archie Cope. She had a son Floy who lives in Milwaukee and was married twice with many progeny; another son Clarence, who is dead and left a son Irving here in Milwaukee; and a daughter who married "Smart Alex" Robinson (?) of Red Granite. Mrs. Archie Cope was named Ida, come to think of it.

Another Cluey of Grandmother Bassett's family was Mrs. Flora Couse, whose husband Jim Couse was an IWW leader in Red Granite. They had 3 children: Albert, who ran a restaurant in Wisconsin Rapids; Jay Couse, whose wife Evelyn Thurston was a sister of Madeline's ex-husband, and Violet Couse, who married Norval Coleman from Wautoma, a neighbor of ours, divorced him and is living in Phipps now. She has a child living, I believe. (Son, now dead.)

Another sister of Grandma Bassett was married to a Brewer and had at least three children I knew of:

- - - Brewer who had a son Clifford Hansen.

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2. Luella Treleven, who had many children. She was married to Joe Treleven from the numerous clan around Fond du Lac. They had a farm south of Fond du Lac near Hamilton Hill.

3. Josephine (Pheenie) Gault, last married to a funeral director of that name at Plainfield, Wis. She had a daughter Myrna Drake (Pheenie's first husband's name) who married someone at the age of 15 and had her first baby when she was 16.

There were others in this old Cluey family. One boy was killed in a long drive.

There are many gaps in this sketchy presentation. We really don't know too much about the inter-relationships of our family and others. The Chaffins of Ripon, for example, are numerous, and some say that the Chapman's of Berlin are part of the family. There are many other relatives I know nothing of. For example, mother had a cousin named Ralph Pardee who served in the Civil War and was in Andersonville Prison. Spelling is a big obstacle since names were so frequently mis-spelled back in the earlier years. The French spellings were particularly twisted. I have heard that Cluey, for example, was originally Cloutier, or Clouquier, or Cloue, but can't vouch for any of it.

Also, the newspaper obituaries are very inaccurate. Often they were given by a relative who knew little of the facts, or gave biased reports because of family feuds. So all I give you is only partial and, perhaps, inaccurate.

Sometime I'll put together some of the stories about the family, most of which are probably fiction, for your amusement.

Regards,

Your Dad

Death Notices

*Late Notices Will Be Found in
the Second News Section*

Blair, Edward R.

Passed away Wed., Dec. 16, 1970,
at Deland, Fla., aged 63 years,
residence 45 Narcissus Dr., De
Bary, Fla., formerly of West Allis,
beloved husband of Myrtle (nee
Mills), dear father of Mrs. Char-
lene (William) Lundy of Lodi,
Wis., fond grandfather of Joyce,
brother of Clemence A. of Milan,
Ill., Clarence of Los Angeles, Car-
roll, Mrs. Amy Syje of Silver
Springs, Maryland, Mrs. Hazel
Kreiss of De Bary, Fla., Naomi
Blair of Los Angeles, Grace Gar-
dos of Europe and Mrs. Madeline
Thurston of Green Bay, Wis., sis-
ters-in-law, brothers-in-law, other
relatives and friends also survive.
Funeral services Mon., Dec. 21, 2
p.m. at the Koeisch Funeral
Home, 7626 W. Greenfield Ave. In-
terment Highland Memorial Park.
In state Sun., 4 to 6 p.m.

12-20-70

Milwaukee Journal